

I Will Survive!

Using Mini Case Studies with Common Student Success Topics



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The Bad Day (or, my first day of college)

Juan arrived at college for his first day of classes on Monday morning. He was so excited – he had signed up for his courses almost a month ago, and couldn't wait to get to his first class today. The first class was from 9:00-9:50am. He got to the parking lot at about 8:50 – and had to circle around for 15 minutes to find a parking spot. So, he walked into class about 10 minutes late.

His instructor had already started, and she was in the middle of going over the syllabus. Juan didn't receive the syllabus, because he was late. So he walked up to the instructor at the front of the class, and asked for one. The instructor gave him a syllabus, and gave him kind of a bad look. He listened while she was talking, but he had to get up so early to get to class, that he kind of zoned out for while. He was startled when she asked them to get out their text to complete an assignment. First, he had heard that the instructors didn't usually make the class stay the whole time the first day, and secondly, he hadn't bought his text yet. He looked on with the girl next to him, but got another disapproving look from the instructor.

Juan's next class was in a different building at 10:00, but he figured he'd better go by the bookstore and purchase the text. When he got there it was mobbed, but he finally found all his texts for his classes, and went to check out. The line was around the corner, but Juan figured he'd better get his texts taken care of, and he was already there and in line, so he stayed. Once he'd paid for his texts, he'd missed his 10:00 class entirely. But, he figured it was only the first day, so it was probably no big deal.

He had plenty of time to get to his 11:00 class, which was a relief – he actually arrived early, and was able to get a seat in the back. This class went fine, until the instructor had them do a preview of the textbook. Turned out, Juan had the wrong book! So, again, he looked on with the person next to him. And, at the end of class, the instructor assigned homework from the text to be handed in Wednesday. But, he did get out of this class early, at least.

Juan's last class was at 12, and it was 11:40, but he was starving – he hadn't had a chance to eat breakfast. He thought he could grab a quick bite, and get to class in plenty of time. He went by the cafeteria, it was as crazy as the bookstore had been, and the line was long. So, he hit the vending machines and got a soda and a candy bar. Now, he was across campus from where his class was, so he hurried, but was still late. He remembered in his first class when the instructor gave him a bad look for walking up and asking for a syllabus, so he thought he would just get one at the end of class. But at the end of class, he had to rush to get to work, so he forgot.

When Juan got back to his car, he had a parking ticket under his windshield wiper. It noted on the ticket that he needed a college parking decal to park on campus. "Great," Juan thought, "what a day!"

What things went wrong in Juan's day on Monday? Was Juan responsible for them or were other people?

What should Juan have done differently in his day?

What does Juan need to do before his next class meetings (which will be Wednesday)? Include actions he should take, as well as places on campus he should visit.

Give two pieces of advice for Juan.

Read the following case studies individually. Then, with your group, discuss the questions. Be prepared to share your groups' thoughts with the class.

Case Study: Joe

Joe's job is to work trade shows. These shows are primarily on Saturdays; each one is about three hours long. This is a relatively new job for Joe – he has only done two trade shows so far. But on the third Saturday, Joe was sick, so he did not go to work. His boss was there, and wondered why Joe didn't show up. He had some work to give him, so he was sure Joe would contact him. But Joe never called or emailed his boss. The next Saturday, Joe's child was ill. So, again, Joe did not go to work the trade show. Joe's boss, at this point, is perplexed – Joe had seemed so motivated the first two weeks, saying how he really needed the job and wanted to succeed. Joe's boss is sure he will hear from him, because again, he has leads from the show he needs Joe to follow up on, but again, he gets no contact from Joe. Joe doesn't show up the following week, either, but by now, Joe's boss figures he needs to hire someone else. But, Joe calls after missing the third trade show, and explains that he was sick, as was his child, and wants to know if he can continue the job, and asks if he can make up the work missed.

- 1) What do you think Joe should have done?
- 2) What do you think Joe's boss should have done?
- 3) Other thoughts, ideas?

Case Study: Mary

Mary is a wife, a mom to 2 kids, and has a full time job. She is also taking two evening courses – one on Monday nights in College Success and one on Thursday nights in Math. She attends the first class in each and is very excited about her choice to return to school to meet her goals. But the second week, one of her children becomes ill, and she misses both classes. She is busy attending to the sick child, and does contact her employer about missing work, but does not contact her instructors. By the second week, the second child and the husband have come down sick as well, and she is not feeling well, either. So, again, she misses classes. She is able to go to work, so she doesn't need to further contact her employer, but she still does not contact her instructors. By the third week, everyone is well, but from taking care of everyone, still trying to work, and battling off the illness herself, Mary is exhausted by the end of the day, and so she misses classes a third time. She does, however, email her College Success instructor and say she knows she has missed classes, but will be in class next week, and wants to see about the make up work.

- 1) What do you think Mary should have done (and/or should do now)?
- 2) What do you think Mary's instructor should have done (and/or should do now)?
- 3) Should Mary's actions be different for the College Success than for the Math class?
- 4) Other thoughts, ideas?

Let Me Tell You Where to Go...

Joe is in his third week of college. He just got his first essay back in his freshman comp 1 class – and he earned a D. He made B's and C's in high school, so he was really surprised by the D – he thought he did way better. Brainstorm three places on campus Joe can visit to get help for his next writing assignment.

Mary has kids and knows how important college can be to a person's future. She couldn't attend college right after high school, but now is determined to get her degree to give her kids a better life, and provide a model for them later in life. The problem is, she's not sure what she wants her major to be. She wants to do something with writing, and she likes to deal with people. She also wants a career that will allow her to still be available for her kids when they're out of school, and, of course, she wants the money to be decent. Where can Mary go to find some help in figuring out what she's good at to help her decide a major? Do you have any career suggestions for Mary?

Tisha has been assigned a project in her Introduction to Humanities course. She is supposed to find some examples of Impressionist paintings and give a factual analysis of each, then her opinion in a review of each piece. She has no clue where to begin. Where can Ana go to get started on this project? (hint – more than one place)

Steve only took three classes this semester – it was all he had time for with his job, and also all he could afford. His job is not great, though, and he doesn't love it, so he's thinking of looking for something else for next semester. However, he's not sure he can afford to change jobs and take four classes next semester. He feels that if he can go to school full time, he can finish more quickly and get on to his eventual career in Criminal Justice. Where can Steve go on campus to get help with his current situation? Do you have suggestions for Steve?

What Do I Take Next Semester?

Lee needs to register for next semester. He did okay this semester – his first – by passing three of his four classes. He is a hospitality/tourism management major. This semester he took student success (of course) and earned a B, College Algebra C, Comp 1 he dropped at mid-term, and he earned a D in Biology. What 4 courses would you suggest Lee take next semester towards completing his general education requirements?

Ana has no declared major, but she knows she wants to obtain an AA degree. This semester, she took 4 classes and earned the following grades: student success A, intermediate algebra B, freshman comp C, and psychology B. what four courses do you suggest Ana take next semester towards her general education requirements?

Dietrich took three classes this semester. He earned an A in elementary algebra, B in prep Reading, and a B in prep writing. He can only take three classes again next semester. Which three do you suggest he take next semester?

Seema took four courses this semester. She had a hard time juggling all her responsibilities, so did not do as well as she would have liked. But she thought she did okay, considering. She earned a C in prep writing 2, failed prep reading 2, earned a B in intermediate algebra, and a D in Introduction to Humanities.

What resource can you use to help decide which courses to suggest for these students?

Where can you (or the students above) go to get help with course planning?

Did you check to make sure that all reading requirements were accomplished first, then all prep courses? Did you consider prerequisites?

Worst Case Scenario:

Prep – for each group, a fictional student’s week, blank weekly schedule, and a “worst case scenario” card (each of these in format for student use is included after instructor materials).

Sample fictional student week –

Joe is a part time student, taking three classes this semester: Intermediate Algebra, Student Success, and Prep English. His Math class meets on Mondays and Wednesdays from 12:30-1:45, Student Success is on Monday afternoons from 3-5:45, and English is on Fridays from 9:00-11:45. Joe lives about 20 minutes from the campus.

Joe works at Disney three nights a week: on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays. He has to be at work at 4:15, and he needs to allow an hour for travel because of traffic. Also, it takes him 30 minutes to get ready for work. He likes to nap from 2-3 on workdays. Joe gets off work at 10:45, and it only takes him about 30 minutes to get home, because there’s usually no traffic at that time a day.

Joe is in a band – they practice twice a week – on Monday nights from 7-10, and on Fridays, Joe either has a gig with the band, or there is practice – also 7-10pm. Joe lives about 15 minutes away from the band’s rehearsal space. Joe has a girlfriend, Mary, and he likes to spend time with her as well, and he likes to surf when he can (but he lives an hour from the beach). And, Joe is also hypoglycemic, so he needs to eat something about every 3 hours. Lastly, Joe lives in his own apartment.

Sample “worst case scenario” cards –

- Traffic on I-4 – accident – takes 1 ½ hours to get to campus on Wednesday.
- Band gets a paying gig Thursday night from 10:30 – 2am. Too much partying afterwards – hung over on Friday and miss class.
- Flu bug going around – wake up sick on Monday morning – sick all day, so end up having to call doctor and make appointment for Tuesday morning at 9am.
- Girlfriend wants to “talk” about Joe not spending enough time with her – need to meet her and have lunch on Friday – and it doesn’t seem like it will be quick.

- Flat tire on way to work on Wednesday – no spare. Joe has to call a friend to pick him up, go get a tire, go back to car, change the tire, then go home (can't go to work at this point because it's too late).
- Hurricane coming – surfs up! Joe decides to go to beach on Tuesday and Wednesday and ditch work and school.
- It's mid-term time! Joe finds out he is failing Math and will need a tutor 2x/week for an hour. He needs to set this up with the tutoring center on campus this week, and start the tutoring this week also.
- Family emergency Saturday at 10am– Joe's brother (who lives in town) has been involved in a car accident. Joe has no other family in town, so he needs to go to the emergency room and sit with his brother until they see him, wait and make sure he's okay, and drive him home.

Divide students into groups of 3-4. Give each group a scenario of a fictional student's week, and a couple of blank weekly schedules. Instruct students to work out a schedule for the student based on the information given in the scenario. After they have worked on the schedules for about 10 minutes, go around and give each group a "worst case scenario" card, and have them readjust the schedules as needed.

Use this activity to begin a discussion about scheduling, prioritizing, and how planning a weekly schedule should include some "buffer time" for unexpected occurrences, rather than planning every minute of time. Also discuss how these "worst case" things happen – sometimes they are not as severe as others, but still, it's how real life goes.

Have students reflect on this activity individually in their journals by writing about a time when they had a planned schedule and it did not go as planned. They should discuss in the journal what they discovered at that time, and how they may handle it differently in the future.

Case study - Joe

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| Time | Sunday | Monday | Tues. | Wed. | Thurs. | Friday | Saturday |
|------|--------|--------|-------|------|--------|--------|----------|
| 6am | | | | | | | |
| 7am | | | | | | | |
| 8am | | | | | | | |
| 9am | | | | | | | |
| 10am | | | | | | | |
| 11am | | | | | | | |
| Noon | | | | | | | |
| 1pm | | | | | | | |
| 2pm | | | | | | | |
| 3pm | | | | | | | |
| 4pm | | | | | | | |
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| 5am | | | | | | | |

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- Family emergency Saturday at 10am– Joe’s brother (who lives in town) has been involved in a car accident. Joe has no other family in town, so he needs to go to the emergency room and sit with his brother until they see him, wait and make sure he’s okay, and drive him home.

Professor Hope's Class

On the first day of his Monday/Wednesday/Friday 9:00 am History class, **PROFESSOR HOPE** discusses the importance of attending his history class every day. Although points are not taken off for attendance and Professor Hope does not take roll, he emphasizes that every class will be important and that successful college students will take the responsibility for being there, taking notes, asking questions, and processing the information discussed in each class.

GLEND A is a single mother with two small children. She wants to become a teacher, and after several years of believing that she couldn't attend college, she obtained financial aid. Her sister has agreed to watch the children while Glenda is in class, and things go well until one Monday morning her sister calls and says she is sick and tells Glenda not to bring the children. Glenda stays home with her children. The following week her youngest child is sick, and she misses class to take her to the doctor. The following week Glenda misses class for a doctor's appointment of her own. And the following week she misses in order to go to court over a dispute with her ex-boyfriend concerning custody of the children.

BILL is a recent high school graduate. He isn't sure what he wants to do, but he's heard that going to college will get him a better job. He commutes 30 miles to school with his friend Ron. Ron's first class doesn't start until noon, but he assures Bill that getting to school early will give him time to study, so he's really glad that Bill has a 9 o'clock class. For the first two weeks of school, Ron picks Bill up at 8 o'clock, but because of heavy traffic, Bill is late a couple of times to Professor Hope's class. After a few weeks, Ron starts picking Bill up later and later, and once or twice he calls to say he can't make it at all. At mid-term, Bill realizes that he has missed Professor Hope's class seven times.

Going to college is not an option for **TAYLOR**. Everyone in his family has always gone to college, and it is expected if he is to join the family business. He is in total agreement with his family. Taylor decides to join a fraternity. He was always popular in high school, likes the guys in the fraternity, and they assure him that he will have fun, but grades are important. The first week of school Taylor misses a couple of classes because of attending parties to decide which fraternity is best for him, and after being out most of the night "partying," he just couldn't get up in time to go to class. As the semester progresses, there are several pledge projects that keep him up late and take up so much time that when he does get to class, he is not prepared.

ALVIN is on the traveling squad for the football team, a real honor for a freshman. Alvin is not sure what he wants out of college other than to play football and possibly make the pros. The coach assures Alvin that football trips are excused absences, so when the squad leaves before 9:00 am on Fridays, he doesn't bother to let Professor Hope know he won't be there nor does he ask

about make up work. He vaguely remembers something in the syllabus about the possibility of going to an 8 o'clock class and the policy for work missed in an "official" capacity. On three separate occasions, the bus leaves at noon on Friday, but Alvin misses class because his name is on the official list and he can count it as an official absence. Alvin is injured in one game and misses class on the following Monday and Wednesday because he really doesn't feel like going to class. After all, everyone knows that professors give athletes special consideration.

* * * * *

Listed below are the students in Professor Hope's class. Rank them in order of their chance of being a successful student in the class. Give a different score to each character. Be prepared to explain your choice.

Most likely to succeed -- 1 2 3 4 -- Least likely to succeed.

| | | | |
|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|
| _____ | Glenda | _____ | Taylor |
| _____ | Bill | _____ | Alvin |

Diving Deeper: What could each student do to improve his/her chance for success?

--Carolyn Hopper, Faculty, Developmental Studies, Middle Tennessee State University, <chopper@mtsu.edu>

Found Money

When her husband died, **YOLANDA** was left with three cars: a sedan, a truck, and a 5-year-old jeep. Yolanda decided to sell them all and buy one new car.

To Yolanda, these cars had more sentimental value than monetary value, especially since her husband had left her with plenty of money. She wanted to make sure each vehicle would go to someone her husband would have liked, so she planned to interview prospective customers until she was satisfied the cars would "go to a good home." A family friend, **VINCE**, volunteered to help Yolanda. He passed the word around to his friends, and one by one people bought the vehicles

The sedan was bought by **MONICA**, a struggling community college student who worked part-time. Her brother lent her the money, and he told her to take her time paying him back. However, she was eager to rid herself of debt, so she took on extra hours at work even though her grades suffered as a result.

FRANK, a firefighter, bought the truck. He did odd jobs in construction during his free time between shifts at the firehouse. He liked to volunteer for Habitat for Humanity and other groups that helped folks in the community. He paid cash because he had received a bonus for an outstanding act of heroism in the line of duty. It seemed like a good way to use the money.

MADELINE and **PHIL** bought the jeep. They already had two cars, a fairly new Cadillac Seville and a Lexus. However, Madeline was a Girl Scout leader, and she wanted the jeep for camping trips.

A week later, Monica decided to give her car a good cleaning. When she removed the floor mats to vacuum, she found a \$100 bill. She called Vince to report her discovery, and he said, "Oh, just keep it. Yolanda's husband was famous for hiding money in odd places. He had plenty of it, but he didn't completely trust banks because of what his family lost during the Depression, so he'd squirrel it away for emergencies. Yolanda doesn't need it, and you can give it to your brother to reduce your debt." Monica decided to follow Vince's advice.

A few days later, Frank took his truck in for a detail job. While he was waiting, **ERIC**, an attendant, came up to him and said, "Mister, you should be glad you came to a reputable place because I just found ten \$100 bills under a mat in your truck." Frank called Vince and told him about the discovery, and Vince repeated the story about how Yolanda's husband had a habit of stashing money. Vince again said, "Just keep it. Yolanda won't even miss it." Frank felt funny about keeping the money, though, so he donated it to Habitat for Humanity. That decision made him feel better.

A few weeks later, Vince was on the phone with Phil, and he told him the stories of the found money. Phil called Madeline at home and said, "Go look under the mats in your jeep and see if there's any money there." Sure, enough, she found an envelope with twenty \$100 bills in it. Madeline called her husband back and told him of her finding, and he then called Vince. Vince said, "Please don't tell Yolanda; she'll wonder whether money was left in the other cars and then the good that came out of those discoveries will be lost." Phil agreed and said, "Besides, we bought the car and that implies we bought anything that was in it. That's a common rule at garage sales, isn't it?" Madeline argued with him, saying, "We didn't 'buy' the money, nor do we need it. We should tell Yolanda and let her decide what to do. I doubt she'll wonder whether her husband had left money in each vehicle."

* * *

Here are the six characters in this story (in order of appearance). Who, if any of them, is most responsible to tell Yolanda about the money found in her vehicles?

___ Vince ___ Monica ___ Frank ___ Madeline ___ Phil ___ Eric

* * * * *

I have used this case study with two different groups. Once I used it with a group of my students, and once with a group of high school teachers at a faculty development training. Both audiences had a wide range of responses. Some people thought Vince had a responsibility to tell Yolanda since he "helped her sell the cars." However, when others pointed out that he did not act as a broker but only passed the word around, some changed their minds. Others thought Monica should have the responsibility because she found the money first. Several in each group thought only Madeline and Phil should return the money, but not Frank or Vince, because "they didn't need the money." I asked the group how much money a person had to have in order to be in the category of "not needing any money," and they argued about that, and the result was that again some people changed their minds. A few in each group thought no one needed to tell, that Yolanda gave up her right to know about the money because she had not been "careful."

Mostly, this case study elicited responses that were not firm. People couldn't make up their minds, or they kept changing them. As a reading activity, it worked wonderfully because people made lots of assumptions they could not back up with information in the story, so when they reread it, they changed their decision.

At the end of the activity, I asked if they would have felt differently if they had known the story was a "true" story instead of a piece of fiction. The teachers said they assumed it was a true story; the students said the story could not be true. Since in actuality it was a bit true and a bit fiction, I haven't made up my mind whether this is important, but I am mulling it over.

I will definitely be using it again because it helped me introduce critical thinking and reading in a provocative way.

--Maggi Miller, Reading, Austin Community College, TX (and now Houghton Mifflin Co.)

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